



## **Motivate Healthy Habits**

**We all know we should drink less, quit smoking and stop sneaking out for maxi-size burger combos at lunchtime, but there's something holding many of us back from making a change.**

Whether it's addiction, emotional eating patterns or plain laziness, American doctor Richard Botelho has come to New Zealand to help us find out what keeps us stuck in our bad habits.



Dr. Botelho, author and Professor of Family Medicine and Nursing at the University of Rochester, New York, will be touring the country until Wednesday 11 June to give a series of nation wide workshops on motivating behavior change for better health.

The doctor is a true crusader, who has a vision of people forming grassroots organizations that will counter the unhealthy messages and vast budgets of fast food and tobacco companies.

Botelho believes that many patients already know what they SHOULD be doing, so repeatedly telling them the same dos and don'ts will not do much good.

Health information and professional advice are successful in changing behavior only 5 to 20 percent of the time, he says.

People need to understand their "emotional resistance" to change, then work out ways to motivate themselves to overcome it.

Botelho gets people to list the benefits and disadvantages of their behaviors so they can get an idea of how ready they are to change.

He distinguishes between "good times" people, who seek instant gratification and avoid stress and responsibility, and "good life" people who invest in their long-term health and well-being.

The doctor readily admits that getting people to live healthier lives is an uphill battle in most western countries.

"We actually live in a disease-producing society where we are bombarded by unhealthy messages and most of what we do is swimming upstream."

He is on a mission while in New Zealand to promote his "Motivate Healthy Habits Movement" among doctors, individuals, organizations and schools.

To start the process, Botelho asks people to identify an unhealthy habit, then assess what they get out of doing it and then what they would get from changing their behavior.

By understanding what they get out of unhealthy behavior, a person can begin to work out what might motivate them to change, he says.

His books and websites contain a wealth of information on setting the process in motion, then becoming a coach and learning how to help others.

Botelho's approach focuses on people's strength, success and health, not on weakness, failure and illness.

## **Don't nag people into change**

It is this positive take on things that leads him to actually advise against trying to force people into changing their unhealthy habits before they are ready to.

Botelho says that people forced to quit something without understanding what drives that behavior in the first place are being set up to fail.

A smoker that reluctantly gives up cigarettes when nagged by their partner is far less likely to succeed than the one that understands their stress patterns and is ready to make a change.

Heart Foundation medical director Dr. Diana North says while Dr. Botelho's program will benefit the general public, the issues covered in each talk are particularly relevant to those working in health promotion and the medical sectors.

"As practitioners, we have been mainly trained in the advice-giving 'fix it' role. Professor Botelho's sessions urge us to better understand our patients', in order to empower them to make change and take control of their own lives."

"If we as a profession, learn from our own life experiences and our struggles to change behavior, this can help us better understand our patients' struggles."

Botelho asks people to separate out their feelings and thinking processes about an issue to pinpoint what motivates their behavior.

His books and websites have numerous quizzes and exercises designed to help people identify what their unhealthy habits are, and where they place their priorities.

For example, are you someone who overeats for short-term emotional gain, but in doing this is sacrificing your health long-term?

Rick Botelho is running seminars in Auckland (5 June), Wellington (10 June) and Christchurch (11 June) while he is in New Zealand. Details are available from the [New Zealand Heart Foundation](#) .

The doctor's personal [website](#) contains plenty of information on his methods, along with exercises to complete and sample book chapters.

His books are not available in stores here but can be ordered through his website.  
[www.motivatehealthyhabits.com](http://www.motivatehealthyhabits.com)

**by Jean McGeorge**

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